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"SWEEP" VILLERS

BEFORE Villers had been a month at school he had betrayed his master passion. He discovered that his house master was expecting an heir. Delicacy was not Villers's strong point, and he at once proceeded to organize a sixpenny sweepstake among the fags. He took no chances, as Knox who drew "triplets" discovered. Villers, himself, drew a blank, but he bought "assorted twins" from Mixon Minor for ninepence, and Villers was, perhaps, the only person who was really pleased when Mrs. Strange presented her husband with—assorted twins: to wit, a thriving boy and girl.

"Sweep" Villers, as he was speedily christened, was no good at games, but despite this handicap he soon made a position for himself in the house. Villers was a "card," to borrow Mr. Bennett's pet word, and boys will forgive much to a genuine "card." Betting and sweepstakes were the two main interests of his life. It was, of course, too risky to bet on racing save in an informal fashion with his young friends, but Villers contrived to get a good deal of amusement without troubling London bookmakers. Villers regarded Providence as a kind of super-bookie and the future as the raw material for bets. Sweepstakes were his main diversion, but he was always ready for a wager. He lost no chances. When Allen, a house prefect, was just on the point of giving Villers a few flicks with a cane for "cutting" fag duty, Villers, who had assumed the orthodox position, glanced over his shoulder and remarked: "Bet you a bob, Allen, I don't get up

between the shots." "I'll take you," said Allen grimly, "but I shall give you an extra two for cheek." "However," as Villers afterward confided to an admiring circle, "I scored all along the line. Allen was so keen to win his bet that he lost his length after the first shot. He didn't keep his eye on the ball. He began to press, and, instead of four beefy drives, he could only manage six regular fozzles. And I won my bob."

To Villers a sweepstake was not only an end in itself but an instrument for investing tedious events with the glamour of adventitious excitement. Moony's terminal sermon, for instance, could scarcely be regarded as anything but an inevitable ordeal, for the dear gentleman never preached for less than half an hour, and within the memory of man he never said anything which bordered on the interesting. But once, at least, in his life he had an excited audience. Once at least he had a listener who was bitterly disappointed when he petered out under the half-hour. That listener was Villers, who had drawn "thirty-five minutes" in the sweepstake on Moony's evening run.

So, too, the Fortnightly Orders were a subject of interest only to a few eccentrics. But one day Villers decided that the Fortnightly Orders should be made an event of first-class importance. He suggested a sweepstake on the result, and the Lower Fifth welcomed the idea with enthusiasm. Twenty-four members of the form contrived to raise a shilling. The twenty-fifth member of the form declined to enter. "Tomkins," said Villers

with sour contempt, "won't go in. He's pi. I expect his father is a Baptist." There was no truth in the deduction from Tomkins's piety, but none the less it was thenceforward accepted as a fact that Tomkins came of Baptist stock, and nothing that Tomkins could say to the contrary could wipe out this stigma on the family name.

It was an interesting draw. Everybody was pleased when Glover and Taylor drew each other. It should be explained that there were two prizes: one for the boy who drew the top of the form, another for the boy who drew the bottom. Now, Glover and Taylor were two veterans who had moved up the school with more dignity than speed. They averaged a remove per annum. They were very ancient and very lazy, and the last two places in the form were theirs by immemorial right.

Now, since there was a prize for the drawer of the bottom boy, Taylor and Glover each had a lively interest in insuring that the other should be bottom. Each of them argued that if he could just beat the other he would win twelve shillings, for neither of them could conceive that the wooden spoon should become the property of any other member of the form. Both of them, therefore, while making a great parade of laziness, began surreptitiously to neglect their work a shade less thoroughly than before.

There were two favorites for the other prize. Poor Tomkins had declined to enter for the sweepstake, but his name had been entered and had been drawn by Cork. Cork was in the same house as Tomkins, but whereas Tomkins was a mere insignificant scholar Cork was in the Cricket Eleven and a great man. Hitherto he had treated Tomkins with good-humored contempt. Tomkins was useful to him. Tomkins was responsible

for Cork's classical studies, his French, and his mathematics. Cork did not overwork Tomkins; he did not give him his essays. Somebody else did the essays.

In consideration for these services Cork had not interfered with Tomkins's ambition to work hard. Cork was a man of large tolerance. If Tomkins liked to "sweat himself blue," that was Tomkins's lookout. So he contented himself with occasional badinage in which Tomkins was asked to explain the pleasure he derived from "oiling."

But, of course, the sweepstake altered Cork's attitude. He had drawn Tomkins, and, if Tomkins could beat Rolland, Cork would win twelve shillings. Clearly, Tomkins must spare no effort to beat Rolland. "Oil," instead of seeming an eccentric hobby, became a civic virtue. Cork began to take the liveliest interest in the progress of his young ward. Cork had been left near the bottom of the form, and Tomkins, who had come up with a head remove, sat just behind him. When Tomkins missed a question, Cork turned round and expressed by crude but intelligible signs his bitter disappointment.

Mr. Strange, who was Cork's house master as well as form master, was very puzzled by this new development. "Why this sudden interest in Tomkins?" he said one day. "I'm not sure that Tomkins is altogether grateful for your attentions."

Tomkins wasn't. Cork's zeal quite put him off. Tomkins began to lose his nerve, and Rolland beat him all along the line.

Cork was quite embittered by Tomkins's failure. "Oh, yes, Tomkins," he said one day, "you can oil all right when it's only to please yourself, but when it's a question of twelve bob for me you simply fizzle everything. You did a rotten rep. this morning. Your father's

a Baptist, isn't he? Well, by gum! if you don't come out top I'll baptize you.”

Tomkins murmured nervously that his father was Church of England.

Cork sat next to Mr. Strange at lunch, and on the fatal Sunday he did his best to pump Mr. Strange. “Has Tomkins come out top?” he pleaded wistfully. “I should so like to know, sir.”

“My dear Cork,” said Mr. Strange, “I can't make you out. You don't usually condescend to take the least interest in your work or anybody else's. What's in the wind?”

Cork was understood to say that the honor of the house was very dear to him, and that while he was doing his best for the house at footer, he expected Tomkins as the star scholar to do his best for the house in school. Mr. Strange asked him if he was feeling the heat.

That afternoon a mûmur of excitement ran round the form-room when Mr. Strange appeared. Besides the sweepstake, most of the Lower Fifth had contracted a number of side bets on the result of the Fortnightly Order. Tomkins and Rolland both carried money, and for the first time in their school careers their respective achievements were a matter of general interest. Cork had despaired of Tomkins and had vainly tried to “sell” him for half a crown. But there were no offers.

Glover and Taylor, who had both been working a little harder and cribbing a great deal more thoroughly, were each convinced that they had beaten the other. Five to four against either of them was freely quoted. Glover was sure that Taylor would be bottom and that he would therefore win the prize allotted to the lucky drawer of the bottom man. Taylor was no less confident that Glover would occupy that ignoble position.

Mr. Strange glanced round the room

before beginning to read out the Order, and remarked dryly: “I am flattered, but a little surprised, at the sudden interest which some of you seem to be taking in the Form Order. This is such a contrast to your usual attitude of bland indifference that I really wonder whether you've been betting on it. The only objection to this theory is that I don't suppose for a moment that any of you consider your school work of sufficient importance to risk a spare sixpence on it.”

Mr. Strange, it will be seen, was a cynic. Only cynics understand boys.

The Form Order was a surprise and a shock to a good many people.

Cork gave a resigned snort when Tomkins was read out second, but Cork's disappointment was mild compared to the fury of Glover and Taylor, who, thanks to their sudden zeal, had risen ten places and were bracketed fifteenth. Never was promotion less welcome. “This is most gratifying,” said Mr. Strange—“most gratifying. Our stalwarts, our Arcades Ambo, have at last shown what they are capable of. I always suspected, my dear Glover, that it was energy rather than brains that you lacked; and you, Taylor, have, I feel sure, done yourself an injustice in the past by your pathetic insistence on your small intellectual endowment. This improvement must be maintained. I shall be very angry with you if you sink back to bottom again.”

Glover and Taylor began to devise some effective punishment for Villers. Villers and his rotten sweepstakes! Good heavens, just think of it! They had been bamboozled out of a prize, and they had set themselves an impossible standard of hard work for the future.

The Form Order contained yet another sensation.

“Sweep” Villers had sunk from twelfth to twenty-fifth. Curiously enough, when

his name was read out bottom of the form a smile of relief seemed to cross his face. Mr. Strange caught this smile. It did not improve matters. "Don't sit there smiling," he said. "It's no use trying to carry off this disgraceful exhibition with an affectation of jaunty indifference.

You don't deceive me, I assure you."

None the less, he was deceived. For Villers's smile was a smile of genuine and unaffected joy. You see, he had drawn himself in the sweepstake, and, as he had managed to come out bottom, he had won twelve shillings.

By ARNOLD LUNN.

From The Cornhill Magazine, London.

INSULT TO INJURY

He had a little motor-car,
It was a Piecrust make—
A kind that never goes too far
And is not hard to break.
He went to see a friend of late,
And left his motor at the gate,
Convinced 'twould be content to wait.

When forth the owner came again
The Piecrust car was gone;
Its winding tracks were very plain
The roadside wet upon.
In anger then poor Mr. Brown
Went chasing through the sleeping town
To run his stolen motor down.

He had not very far to go,
For there the Piecrust stood,
Well in a street lamp's tender glow,
And pinned upon its hood
This note: "Keep it who'er you are!
I've pushed the bally thing this far.
I thought it was a motor-car!"

From The Bulletin, Sydney, Australia.